

August 2, 2015

“Living the Word: No Other Gods”

Deut. 6:6-7

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church

We’ve all seen these stickers on the back of cars and mini-vans, right? They’re everywhere. This kind of family sticker reminds us that families come in all different shapes and sizes; and all different kinds of body styles, too, apparently. You’ve probably seen so many of these family stickers that you don’t any attention to them.

But maybe we should. Maybe what we ought to do, whenever we see one of these stickers, is to say a little prayer. “God, bless that family. God, give help, give strength, give wisdom and patience to those parents. God, help those children to know your love and to walk in your ways.”

Praying for families is important, because family life isn’t getting any easier these days. Parenting today? It’s tough work, isn’t it? It’s always been tough work; but raising children in a responsible Christian manner, and building our family lives on the Word of God, I think, is getting harder and harder.

Colleen and I have raised our five kids. The youngest is already 22, and it seems like just yesterday that they were all in pre-school. In that short time, though, a great deal has changed in our world. There are so many new pressures, 21st-century challenges, and contemporary stresses for Christian parents and families to wrestle with.

And this is true not just for young families, but for all of us. Whether you’re single, married, divorced, widowed, young, or old – whether you’re part of a large family or a family of

one -- it's getting harder for any of us to be faithful and consistent when it comes to "*Living the Word.*"

And, you know, that's exactly what God wants for all of his people to be doing. He wants us to hear his Word, study it, inwardly digest it; but, most of all, God wants Christians like us to be "*Living the Word.*" He wants our daily lives to be true to the Word. God wishes for our relationships and friendships to be grounded and governed by his Law and his Gospel. The Lord's strong desire is for our families and homes to be influenced by his Word every day – to be strengthened by the Word, reflective of the Word, true to his Word.

"These words that I command you today shall be on your heart," we heard God say in our Old Testament reading. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Clearly, God wants all of his people to be "*Living the Word.*"

That's true in our homes and families. It's true here in our church family, too. You may or may not be a parent or grand-parent of one of the children or youth that fill this place. But we are all part of a family here at Hope, and we are all playing a part in raising kids of the kingdom here. Every member of this church has a sacred responsibility from God: to help raise Hope's children in the faith, to provide a Christ-centered ministry to Hope's children and youth, to help our kids come to know and love Jesus.

Think of your church family like this. Imagine that's on your car's back window. But that's the reality. There are hundreds of children and youth here at Hope that we are helping to grow up in God's kingdom.

So here at Hope we are going to focus together, for several weeks, on what it means for us to be *“Living the Word.”* And we’re zeroing in, specifically, on the Ten Commandments.

Today, we’ve been talking about the First Commandment. “You shall have no other gods before me,” the Lord commands us. Very simply, that means putting God first. It means not trusting and not loving anything or anyone more than we trust and love God. Living the First Commandment means giving God the supreme place, the top spot, in our hearts and minds – but, also, in our day-to-day business and activities.

How’s that First Commandment going, in your home? Is God #1 there? Is God really #1 there all the time? Some of the time? Any of the time?

It’s so easy for all of us, in our home life, to bump God from the top spot, to supplant him. It’s so easy to let other things, other priorities, other pursuits, other people, become more important to us than God is.

Can money become more important than God? Can our jobs and careers? Can good health, and a comfortable home, and nice vacations, and fancy cars become more important to us than God? Do you care more about what your friends think of you than what God thinks of you? Are your leisure-time activities, your time at the gym, and your sports interests more precious to you than the time you spend with the Lord and his Word? Can your phone, your social media, and your TV become idols? “No other gods!” Anything or anyone that we love, trust, or care about more than God is a violation of the First Commandment.

I may be stepping on some toes with these examples; but I challenge you to work at applying this First Commandment in the everyday life of your Christian home. Give it some thought. Be honest with yourself, and with your family. Take a hard look at whatever it may be that you're putting before God. As Christian disciples, friends, we need to get more serious about "*Living the Word.*"

And we need some serious help, too, don't we? Because none of us can really keep this First Commandment, let alone all the rest of them. My sin makes it hard for me. Your sin makes it impossible for you. But here's where Christ our Savior fits into our lives, and into our families. Christ has kept the Law of God perfectly, all the commandments. Christ has given his life, to pay for our sins. Christ has forgiven us, and given us a new start with God. And Christ gives us the strength, by the work of his Spirit inside us, to start "*Living the Word.*" Christ can give you the strength to start refocusing your families, to start rebuilding your relationships, to start setting new and godly priorities in your life and in your Christian home.

The First Commandment tells us all, "You shall have no other gods before me." In response, please join me in a prayer that Christ our Savior may give this family the strength to start living this Word.

Lord Jesus Christ, we are weak. We are easily distracted. We are helpless, when it comes to keeping your commandments. But we turn to you, our precious Savior, for the help we need. Shower your divine grace on us, to forgive our sins. And use your divine power in our homes and families, to strengthen us for daily living by your Word. We pray this in sincere faith, dear Jesus. Amen.